

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

UNCLAS VATICAN 004461

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

DEPT. FOR EUR/WE-LEVIN; EAP/BCLTV, AF/W, AF/E and INR/B
NAIROBI PLS PASS KHARTOUM EMBASSY OFFICE

E.O. 12958 N/A

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PINR](#) [SOCI](#) [VT](#)

SUBJECT: POPE SELECTS 31 NEW CARDINALS, REINFORCING
ECCLESIASTICAL VISION AND GEOPOLITICAL REACH

Summary

[1](#)1. (SBU) Pope John Paul II's nomination of 31 new cardinals September 28 consolidates the group that will name his successor, reinforces Church leaders facing threats from Islam or restrictive regimes, and rewards several long-serving bishops for their service to the Church. The surprise announcement -- following repeated curial denials that a consistory would be held during the celebrations of the 25th anniversary of John Paul II's pontificate -- may have also reflected a sense of urgency due to the pontiff's recent failing health. While some names were expected -- heads of Vatican departments or leaders of major archdioceses around the world -- others reflected the pope's geopolitical focus on Islam, Africa and the Church's experience of persecution. With the creation of this new group of cardinals, John Paul II will have created 130 of the 135 cardinals under the age of 80 and hence eligible to vote for the next pope when the time comes -- provided they have not reached their 80th birthday by then. While John Paul's previous appointments had already molded the group according to his ideological vision, the infusion of these 31 new cardinals will further ensure the election of a like-minded successor. End Summary.

Foreign Minister "en rouge"

[1](#)2. (SBU) Vatican Foreign Minister, French-born Archbishop Jean-Louis Tauran, was one of seven Curia officials to be nominated a cardinal. Tauran, 60, suffers from Parkinson's disease and his retirement from the FM position has been the subject of recent speculation. Tauran's resignation will take effect October 22 when he is expected to take up a less demanding curial position -- potentially as head of the Vatican library and archives. Possible contenders for the FM post include Archbishop Claudio Maria Celli, an expert on China and Vietnam, Archbishop Giovanni Lajolo, Nuncio to Germany, Archbishop Luigi Ventura, Nuncio to Canada, and Archbishop Nikola Eterovic, Nuncio in Ukraine.

Reinforcing the Church Under Threat

[1](#)3. (SBU) Among the 31 newly nominated cardinals was the Archbishop of Khartoum, Gabriel Zubier Wako. The choice of Wako in Khartoum --- a post not traditionally filled by a Cardinal -- demonstrates the importance the Holy See places on the Church's status in Sudan where it has been under pressure from Sudan's Islamicist government. Elevating Wako is also a strong affirmation of Sudan's Catholics, who have suffered three decades of difficulty in a powerful Islamic milieu. Likewise, Ho Chi Minh City's archbishop, Jean-Baptiste Pham Minh Man, receives his red hat for analogous reasons -- affirmation for a community pitted against the obstructionism and detainment policy of the Communist government. The Pope's personal experience under oppressive regimes makes him highly sympathetic to Churches in similar situations and thus more inclined to affirm them with the naming of a cardinal. In addition, the Pope named one cardinal "in pectore," whose name is not revealed, and it is thought that this could be Archbishop Joseph Zen of Hong Kong -- though this remains speculation.

Africa: Building the Church

[1](#)4. (SBU) The rapidly growing church in Africa also attracted the Pope's attention, resulting in a larger share of the scarlet for the continent. The three new members will help to redress Africa's current underrepresentation in the College of Cardinals, though critics complain that both Africa and Latin America still remain

underrepresented. The elevation of the Archbishop of Cape Coast, Ghana, Peter Turkson, is a further reflection of Pope John Paul's attention to the Muslim world, as the Catholic Church in Ghana is challenged by a strong

proselytizing effort by Muslims. One can see similar motives in the nomination of Nigeria's new cardinal, Anthony Olubunmi Okogie, of Lagos -- Africa's second largest Catholic community.

Sole Red Hat for the US

15. (SBU) Only one American cardinal was named -- Philadelphia's new archbishop, Justin Rigali. Rigali is a personal friend of the Pope and served many years as a member of the Vatican Curia. The Philadelphia seat is traditionally held by a Cardinal. So is the Boston seat, and thus the decision not to nominate the newly-appointed Archbishop of Boston, Sean O'Malley, raised some eye-brows in Vatican circles. O'Malley this July replaced Cardinal Bernard Law, who resigned after his mishandling of the clerical sexual abuse scandal in Boston. Although O'Malley has already proven himself to be the right man to put the Boston shop in order, it is unusual for an archbishop to be created a cardinal while his predecessor is still under 80 and eligible to vote in a papal election. Still, it is clear that Law still has strong support at the Vatican from many who believe he was treated as a scapegoat in the sex scandal. With the omission of O'Malley, Law was spared the ignominy of his successor's immediate elevation to the College of Cardinals.

Comment

6.(SBU) The latest brace of cardinals contains few real surprises. Pope John Paul has nominated men he can trust who have proven themselves faithful sons of the Church. Additionally, the Pope has elevated to cardinal individuals in posts traditionally filled by cardinals. As a result, Italy gained six new cardinals, while all of Latin America, with the largest Catholic population in the world gained only three. While many expected the Pope to announce the new cardinals early in 2004, it made more economic and logistical sense to conduct the ceremony while the whole College was gathered in Rome to celebrate his 25th anniversary in October. Vatican officials have told us that the slate of nominees has been ready for several weeks. This does not discount a certain nervousness in the Vatican about the Pope's increasingly frail health -- a fact in evidence September 28 when the struggle to pronounce the names of the new cardinals left him physically exhausted and supporting his head with one hand. Regardless of the timing of the election of the next pope, this group will join with the current cardinals to elect a successor from the same ecclesiastical mould as John Paul II. Whether a successor would have a similar geopolitical vision is less predictable. End comment.

Nicholson

NNNN

2003VATICA04461 - Classification: UNCLASSIFIED